

Four babies lay in their cradles now. Beginning to think of "What shall I do? The world to brighten and beautify." The Spring baby first said, "Let me try." So she put on a dress of freshest green, With trimmings the loveliest ever seen—Trimmings of tulips and hyacinths rare. And trailing arbutus looped everywhere. "How perfectly beautiful," Summer said; "But wait till you see my dress of red And darker green with golden spots, Trimmed with roses and pinks and forget-me-nots."

"Pooh!" said Autumn, "my dress will be A more substantial one, you'll see; With skirt of finest and yellowest wheat, A girdle of grapes and squash turban neat."

Then Winter came silently tripping along Chanting softly a Christmas song, In a pure white dress with jewels spread, Holding a basket of books on his head.

Poems and stories and pictures were there Of the Christ child, the yule log, of folklore rare, "I am not in bright colors," he said, with a smile, "But the long winter evenings my gifts here beguile."

—[Helen Adelaide Ricker.

BUNT JEAN'S ROMANCE.

BY BESSIE MAY TOBIN.

And to think! I really hated the idea of going. When Aunt Caroline's letter came inviting me, mamma thought it would be rude if I did not accept the invitation, as she expressed a sincere desire to see me. But, for my part, I had always heard it was the dullest place in Christendom; and if it hadn't been that mamma really insisted, I don't think I would have budged in that direction, Aunt Caroline's displeasure notwithstanding.

But I finally.

It was a queer little village. The houses, trees—everything—seemed so low, I mean, near to the ground, as if all were young, but might grow taller in time.

Aunt Caroline's house was the largest in town, except one that was next door to it; and which was in every point its counterpart and facsimile. The two houses were exactly alike, and with only a brick wall dividing them.

Even the vines and roses on the front porch were alike, as if each had been planned in exact similitude of the other.

Both houses were in the suburbs of the village, and both had a pretty lawn in front.

Aunt Caroline received me cordially enough; but I took to Aunt Jean at once. I never did truly love Aunt Caroline. She was so tall and forbidding. Nobody knew her age, but I supposed it to be a long way into 50. She was a typical old maid.

Aunt Jean, on the contrary, was all that is sweet and lovable. Rather short and plump, sweet and fair, with dimples in her cheeks, and the daintiest little plump white hands.

There was nothing so sweet as Aunt Jean's face, and nothing so sad. Yes; Aunt Jean was an old maid, too, but she didn't look it; for she was certainly the gentlest, sweetest creature in the world.

It struck me as somewhat singular that all the windows and blinds on the side of the house next its twin sister were invariably drawn in or pulled down; and neither my aunts nor any of the servants ever mentioned the next-door neighbor, or seemed to be in any way conscious that there was a house on the other side of the brick wall.

That there were inmates to it I knew, for I had seen people on the piazzas and in the garden, notably a very good-looking young man.

One day I boldly put the question to my aunts as to the name and condition of our neighbors; but I was silenced so perceptively and unsatisfactorily by Aunt Caroline, and saw such a painful expression come to my Aunt Jean's face that I dared not press the subject further, yet determined to get at the bottom of the mystery, for it was a mystery, by some means of my own making.

I disliked to question the servants, feeling a delicacy in so doing, but bided my time until something should turn up to unfold the secret.

I had been there about three weeks, when one day I took a book and went down into the orchard to read. I was thrown upon my own resources for entertainment, outside my two aunts' society. I really enjoyed chatting with Aunt Jean—for, thus far, I had met none of the young people of the village, which I thought was rather strange.

The truth was—I found out later—that my Aunt Caroline's sharp tongue had made her unpopular; and Aunt Jean was so sad and timid that it was very seldom anybody ever came to the house.

Well, this particular morning I took a book into the orchard, and finding a very "shadie nooke" where a huge old elm tree stood right up against the wall, making a very pleasant seat with back to it, I climbed upon the wall, and, deliciously ensconced in the "shadie nooke," I gave myself up to the luxury of an interesting story.

It wasn't a very romantic thing to do, if a natural one, but after a half hour or so I got drowsy and fell asleep against the old elm tree, and presently my book tumbled out of my hand, and of course on the wrong side of the wall. I woke with a start—first, to bless heaven that I had not gone over myself, and then to conclude that it was a most distressing piece of ill luck that my book should be over in the enemy's yard and no means at hand by which to get it back. At this juncture I had the breath taken out of me by a stone that came crashing through the branches within six inches of my head. I scrambled to the top of the wall, and, in a kind of dazed fashion, to see the good-looking young man not twenty yards away, standing stockstill and covered with confusion. It truly isn't a usual thing in polite society for a young gentleman to throw stones at a young lady. At first he was tongue-tied; then he hurried on to beg a thousand pardons and to explain that he had only seen

my head moving between the branches and thought it was a cat. Mind you, a cat. A yellow cat, too, I suppose, for my hair is yellow. A cat, he said, for which he entertained a most murderous antipathy—a regular ribald that had in truth been disturbing both our dreams nightly for some time. Then we began to laugh about it, and it wasn't long before he was on the wall by my side and we were chatting away like old cronies.

It was a little improper, I admit, but you know a starving man will not likely refuse a dainty morsel given him, and I was ready to die from loneliness.

Well, after that the old elm tree got to be a regular trysting place, and very soon—but this is Aunt Jean's romance, not mine.

Walter Fairfax was his name. He had come to study medicine with his uncle, Dr. John Fairfax, the owner, and besides himself the only occupant of the next door house. The old gentleman, I inferred from what he said, had in a measure adopted him.

After a good while, with considerable trepidation, I put a few questions to him relative to the feud existing between the two families, and found that he knew as little and was as curious about it as myself.

We soon began to compare ourselves to the Capulets and Montagues; and he said if he was Romeo I must be—but there I go again.

Well, it soon came to this, that Walter loved me and I loved Walter, and we admitted as much to each other and had come to the conclusion that things couldn't go on in this unsettled, unsatisfactory way. Walter insisted upon coming over and speaking to my aunts about it, and when he would take no refusal I promised to mention the subject to my aunts myself. It was a most absurd state of things, and I was determined to get at the bottom of the trouble. I knew that for some reason any allusion made respecting our neighbor was painful, really distressing to Aunt Jean, so I made up my mind to unbosom myself one afternoon when Aunt Jean had gone out by questioning Aunt Caroline regardless of consequences. This I did. I went to her room and found her alone. Aunt Jean had gone for a walk, and without preamble I let it off.

You will not believe me when I tell you the old lady fainted outright. Well, she did; and such a time I hope I will never have again. But I got the secret. It seemed that long ago, when they were young, Aunt Jean and the old doctor over the way had been lovers, but that a few weeks before the marriage the old fellow had just quietly walked off and jilted Aunt Jean, which almost broke her heart; and for no rhyme or reason that anybody could see had, indeed, stayed off until the last few years, when he suddenly came back one day, and had been at home ever since, for which Aunt Caroline had sworn a vendetta against him and every relative connection of his.

Of course it was very bad for him, and I felt very indignant, but I could not help it, nor yet could Walter; so when Aunt Caroline quietly forbade me even to speak to Walter again I simply told her I could not and I would not make any such promise.

She seemed to regard my loyalty to Walter as the most unprecedented ingratitude and bad faith on my part, and told me plainly that she would write at once to mamma to explain, and upon receipt of mamma's letter I was to pack up and put out for home.

Of course I went straight to Walter, waiting at the old trysting-tree, and wept away my wrath and indignation in his comforting arms. He consoled me by saying that he would come to my home to see mamma about it, and felt sure that he could make it plain to her that he was in no way accountable for what his uncle might have done. He said also that in three months he would be 21, when he would come into some property of his own—and—who would think this was Aunt Jean's romance?

Aunt Caroline after this kept such a sharp eye on me that it was almost impossible ever to get a meeting with Walter. But we wrote letters every day and put them into a crack in the wall, which made a nice little post-office.

But the days sped by and mamma's letters came. I did not think it was in mamma to be so cruel and hard-hearted. There is no use to tell you all she said. It was what Aunt Caroline wanted her to say, and it meant that I was never again to have anything to do with Walter, and she said I was to come straight home. Of course all this was kept from Aunt Jean, but I had the greatest mind to tell. The only thing that restrained me was that I hated so to mention the subject to her, hated so the idea of hurting her.

It was the afternoon before the day on which I was to be shipped home in disgrace, when I walked out quietly right before Aunt Caroline's eyes and went down into the orchard to meet Walter. Why she didn't follow I can't see. I guess I looked sad she was afraid to inflame me any further.

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